

[lowellsun.com](https://www.lowellsun.com)

Baker reversed course on gun shop, range openings – Lowell Sun

5-6 minutes

BOSTON – Gun shops and shooting ranges will not be allowed to open under Gov. Charlie Baker's latest order to keep all non-essential businesses closed through May 4, but for a brief period on Tuesday the gun industry thought things might be different.

Baker on Tuesday announced that he was extending his executive order closing all non-essential businesses for another month, and updating the list of businesses and workers that would be allowed to continue to physically operate.

Jim Wallace, executive director of the Gun Owners Action League, saw the updated list of essential businesses posted to the state's website, and prepared a memo for his members. The new list, Wallace told them, mirrored the guidance released over the weekend by the federal government allowing gun shops to open their doors.

Until it didn't.

"Our stuff matched word for word what the federal advisory does, so we told our members," Wallace said Wednesday, in an interview.

"It wasn't an hour after we put that out that they had edited it to remove firearm retailers and shooting ranges. And I said, 'Wait a minute. I know that was there.'"

Baker's administration, according to interviews with lawmakers and gun rights advocates, abruptly changed course and amended its list of essential businesses to exclude gun retailers and shooting ranges from its newest order after receiving pushback, including a call from House Speaker Robert DeLeo's office.

The newest order took effect at noon Wednesday.

Wallace said he called the administration also, and it was confirmed to him that the initial order had been amended. For him, it was the final straw.

"There are a few things going on between the administration and our community that we are now just calling discrimination," Wallace said. "We understand what everybody needs to do, but I can get a latte and a pizza, but I can't exercise a civil right?"

DeLeo's office also noticed the initial list of essential businesses and "immediately expressed its concern," according to an official in the speaker's office. DeLeo's office was notified later in the day by the administration that the list had been updated, the source told the News Service

Gun control has been one of the speaker's signature issues in his more than 10 years leading the House, and he mostly recently led the effort on Beacon Hill to pass a "red flag" law allowing law enforcement, family and mental health professionals to petition the courts to have someone's firearms temporarily taken away if they are deemed a threat to themselves or others.

Rep. Majorie Decker, who worked closely with DeLeo to get that law passed, thanked DeLeo on Twitter for pressuring Baker to reconsider the initial order as it related to guns.

In an interview, Decker acknowledged that there had been some confusion concerning the essential business list and gun shops after it was first issued Tuesday.

“At a time when we need to be concerned about issues of suicide and domestic violence, I am really happy that Speaker DeLeo continues to help keep an eye on the safety and security of Massachusetts residents and I’m grateful that Gov. Baker was amenable to working with him to ensure that any regulation coming out would not consider retail and gun ranges as essential services,” the Cambridge Democrat told the News Service.

The governor’s office told the News Service that it followed the federal guidance on essential businesses, but “tailored the list” to Massachusetts’s economy and made efforts to maintain “as stringent a list as possible to ensure people continue to avoid unnecessary activities.”

The final list of essential services included “workers supporting the operation of firearm or ammunition product manufacturers, importers, and distributors.”

“These suppliers support the manufacturing or distribution of firearms and ammunition for the military and law enforcement. Military and law enforcement are considered essential services. Gun shops (retailers) are not listed as essential,” a spokeswoman emailed.

The administration did not respond to follow-up questions about whether or why the list had been amended after it was first published online.

Wallace noted that many gun stores in Massachusetts sell personal protective equipment and other gear to police departments, not just

guns and ammunition.

Wallace said GOAL, which is the local chapter of the National Rifle Association, also had initially asked the Executive Office of Public Safety to issue an order regarding gun licenses to preserve the status quo and take matters of renewals and other issues off the plates of local police, but was denied.

Then, he said, Baker rolled out a \$10 million loan fund for small businesses that excluded gun retailers.

“Why would you do that? Most of them are mom and pop shops. That was strike two,” Wallace said.